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Author(s): R. R. Betts

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THE PLACE OF THE CZECH REFORM MOVEMENT IN THE HISTORY OF EUROPE

BETWEEN 1350 and 1450 there took place in Bohemia a profound and violent revolution in its moral, religious and political life. It has long been recognised, especially by the Czechoslovaks, that in the history of their own country this movement was decisive in shaping its character and destiny, and they have devoted much patient and scholarly labour to its elucidation. From the time of Palacký the orthodox school of Czech historians has seen in the Czech reform movement the flowering of that sense of morality and nationality which it regards as the essence of Czech history. Others, especially Pekař and Sedlák, while recognising its importance, have been less enthusiastic, and more ready to see the harm done by self-isolation and schism, or more inclined to regard the reform movement as an aberration.¹ Some German scholars also have studied it: Lechler with much sympathy and understanding; Höfler and Loserth with a scholarship marred by animosity against all things Slav in general and Czech in particular.² English historians, better acquainted with the German than with the Czech language, have until recently been too ready to accept the German assessment and therefore to think of the movement as beginning with Hus, and of Hus as but an echo of Wyclif. But hitherto Czechs and Germans alike have been mainly interested in the movement as a chapter in Czech history, as leading to the establishment of a national Church under a national king.

Yet the movement is clearly more than that; it is an integral part of the history of Europe. The Czech reform movement cannot be rightly appreciated unless it is looked at as a part of a social, moral and political revolution affecting the whole continent, nor can the history of Europe be rightly understood without an under-

¹ The more important general treatments in Czech of the Czech reform movement are: Palacký, F., *Dějiny národa českého*, Prague, 1848-1875, 1908; Novotný, V., *Náboženské hnutí české ve 14 a 15 stol.*, Prague, 1915; Bartoš, F. M., *Husitství a cizina*, Prague, 1931; Novotný, V., and Kybal, V., *Mistr Jan Hus, život a učení*, Prague, 1919-1931; Sedlák, J., *Mistr Jan Hus*, Prague, 1915. Cf. Pekař, J., *Smysl českých dějin*, Prague, 1936.

² Lechler, G. V., *Johannes Huss*, Halle, 1890; Höfler, C., *Geschichtschreiber der hussitischen Bewegung in Böhmen* (Fontes Rerum Austriacarum, Abt. i, ii, vi, vii), Vienna, 1856-1866; Loserth, J., *Huss und Wiclif*, 2nd ed., Munich, 1925. For a corrective see Špinka, M., *John Huss and Czech Reform*, Chicago, 1941.

standing of the particular manifestation in Bohemia of the general revolution.

We are to-day beginning to understand how fundamental and influential was that transference of economic and political power from the owners of land to the owners of personal property, which made the commercial revolution of the 14th and 15th centuries no less historically decisive than the industrial revolution of the 19th. Government was passing out of the hands of landed proprietors into those of the Bardi, Medici, Ursins, de la Poles, Philpots, and the merchants of Venice, Ghent, Cologne, Lübeck, Novgorod and Prague ; the chanceries of popes, emperors and kings were becoming powerful bureaucracies of middle-class commercially minded men ; the possession of goods and money was becoming more decisive than the ownership of forests and castles ; ships and harbours, roads and bridges, letters of credit and bills of exchange, loans and banks and bankers, were becoming the decisive factors in the new society. It is true of course that land and the landowner were not yet completely deposed from their former hegemony, especially in Spain, Poland and Hungary, and that for centuries the majority of the people in even the most progressive states would continue to earn their livelihood from the land. But the power of capital was such that a handful of bankers and merchants could direct the destinies of whole communities. The centres of political power were now determined by considerations of communications and the siting of mineral wealth. That is why Prague in the 14th century became suddenly the "imperial metropolis," as Matěj z Janova described it.³

What attracted Charles IV, Luxemburger and Francophile as he was, to make Bohemia the centre and mainstay of his Empire was his conscious realisation that this inheritance from his Czech mother alone of all his dominions could provide him with the wealth and men to make his rule effective ; not to mention his unconscious appreciation of the value of the silver and gold, the salt, glass and leather of the country, of the industry and skill of its mixed, energetic and enterprising population, as well as of the central position of Prague, towards which and from which led the highways of the Elbe, the Oder and the Danube, and where the route from the Adriatic to the Baltic crossed that from the Bosphorus to the English Channel. The rapid development of the commerce and industry of Prague was both the cause and the consequence of the fact that from 1346 to 1410 here was the Imperial capital, where

³ Matěj z Janova, *Regulæ Veteris et Novi Testamenti*, ed. Kybal, V., III, 357.

German-speaking merchants in the Old Town were challenged and stimulated by the rapid growth of the New Town, which Charles founded and filled with artisans and craftsmen of Czech speech. And towns have ever been the forcing grounds of social progress and political revolution. Members of this new and growing class figure in almost every incident of the reform movement. It was the German burghers of Prague who so filled the Týn church to hear Konrád Waldhauser's denunciation of the greed and idleness of the monks and the worldliness and avarice of the friars that he had to preach in the great square outside; it was the Czech artisans and shopkeepers who flocked to hear Milíč preach in their own language, at St. Giles's in the Malá Strana, and their sons whom he instructed in Latin in the art and duties of a preacher at St. Nicholas's in the Old Town. When Milíč preached that the wars and pestilences of his own day, the division of nation against nation, the avarice and self-indulgence of clergy and laity alike, were all signs that the abomination of desolation was already set in the holy place, that Antichrist was at hand, and that the year of the prophet Daniel was already come, he was merely stating in the terms of apocalyptic the historical fact that he was living in an age of revolution, and that an ecclesiastical and moral order designed for an agricultural, feudal, unnational society was breaking down in the new commercial and nationalist society in which he and his hearers were living.⁴ When Tomáš ze Štítného wrote his books on morality and religious education in Czech rather than Latin, it was because he was unconsciously impelled to appeal to an audience of literate but unscholastic townsfolk and county gentry that was typical of the new age. As the reform movement grows and develops, more and more do we find that the middle classes play a part. For example among those who strove to preserve Milíč's refuge for repentant prostitutes, known as "Jerusalem," for its original purpose after his death, besides the lord of Rožemberk, Matěj z Janova and various priests, we find Angelo the apothecary,⁵ Machuta "the cloth cutter," and Kříž "the shop-keeper."⁶ The same Kříž "kramář" was the moving force in the founding of the chapel of Bethlehem in 1391 as a centre for preaching, and from its pulpit John Protiva, Stephen

⁴ See Jan Milíč z Kroměříže, *Libellus de Antichristo*, in Matěj z Janova, *Regulae*, III, 368-81.

⁵ This Florentine, who had settled in Prague, and who had introduced Cola de Rienzi to Charles IV there, is an interesting example of the fruitful intercourse between the great commercial centres of Europe at this time.

⁶ These are the people addressed in the letter of Vojtěch Raňkův, written just before his death, asking them to resist the efforts of the Cistercians to take over "Jerusalem." See Novotný, *Náboženské hnutí*, pp. 140-41.

of Kolín, and finally Hus himself were to stir the Praguers to a practical and enduring zeal for reform. In the stormy years after archbishop Zbyněk took active steps against the "Wyclifites" of Prague in 1408, the Praguers, supported by king Wenceslas IV and egged on by the fiery eloquence of Jerome of Prague, broke out into a series of anticlerical riots which well illustrate the incompatibility of the vested interests of the church and the dissatisfaction of a bourgeoisie becoming conscious of its strength. This may be illustrated from Peter of Mladoňovice's account of the examination of Hus at Constance on 7 June, 1415 :

It was also charged against him that his scandalous and erroneous sermons caused a great sedition in the city of Prague, and by reason of the guile and guilt of John Hus many notable and catholic god-fearing men were forced to go and hide outside the city ; there ensued slaughter, robberies, sacrilege and other horrible and execrable acts, of which John Hus was the cause and in which he participated. He replied that the riots were not due to him, but to the interdict imposed for two miles round Prague by archbishop Zbyněk when the king and the university declared their neutrality [as between the rival popes Gregory XII and Benedict XIII], for Zbyněk having despoiled the tomb of St. Wenceslas fled to Roudnice, whither the prelates and clergy followed him ; for they refused to obey the king and carry on divine service, but fled, and so others took over their affairs [the king confiscated their revenues], "but," Hus said, "not by my order or under my leadership."

And Náz said : "No, reverend fathers, it was not out of disobedience to the king's wishes, but because of the robberies the clergy had suffered that they asked the archbishop to impose the interdict, and that was why they were despoiled."

And the cardinal of Cambrai [Pierre d'Ailli], commissioner and judge at this hearing, said : "I must testify at this point. When I was riding from Rome, certain prelates from Bohemia met me, and when I asked them what the news was there, they replied : 'O, most reverend father ! It is bad : all the clergy have been robbed of their prebends and have been ill treated.' " 7

From the long list of charges made against Jerome of Prague in May, 1416, it is possible to supplement this picture. When the papal indulgence was preached in Prague in 1412 there were organised demonstrations in the parish and monastic churches ; the preachers were interrupted and the protesters made public denials of the right of the Pope to use such means to raise money for his war against Ladislav of Naples. Three of the interrupters were arrested by the

⁷ Petri de Mladenowic, *Relatio*, apud Palacký ; *Documenta magistri Johannis Hus vitam . . . concernantia*, pp. 282-83

magistrates of the Old Town (probably German "patricians") and, despite a deputation from the University which pleaded that they should be leniently treated, they were speedily and secretly beheaded, not in the usual places under the pillory, but clandestinely and surrounded by a strong guard—"for fear of the people," as the contemporary chronicler records. When the corpses were discovered, a huge mob of weeping and angry citizens and students escorted them to the Bethlehem chapel, where they were honoured with the rites customarily paid to martyrs.⁸ The same articles charged against Jerome tell also of another organised demonstration in Prague, when a student standing in a cart and dressed like a prostitute, and with the hated bull of indulgence suspended round his neck, was escorted by a tumultuous crowd, to whom he leeringly offered his wares, all round the city to the market place of the Old Town, where the dummy bull was publicly burnt.⁹ During the same year, 1412, and again in 1414, this campaign of organised demonstrations against what had come to be regarded as the worst instruments of clerical extortion and superstition was directed against crucifixes, which were plastered with human dung, and relics, which were snatched out of their coffers and trampled underfoot under the eyes of the friars who had them on show in order to attract the offerings of the devout.¹⁰

These scenes of protest and disorder in Prague are closely parallel to what was happening at much the same time in other centres of the adolescent bourgeoisie, to the murder of Archbishop Sudbury by Wat Tyler's mob in 1381, to the violent attack on the privileged and established order of things by the Cabochiens in Paris in the years 1411 to 1413, to the rising of the "Ciompi" against the patrician oligarchy of Florence in 1378, or to the revolt of Ghent against the Count of Flanders in 1382.

* * *

To some extent we are confirmed in the view that the Bohemian reform movement was part of the general European middle-class revolution when we examine the social provenance of the leading reformers. Jan Milíč was a Moravian who retained his provincial accent even after he had been a civil servant for four years, and the fact that between 1358 and 1362 he was successively registrar, corrector and notary in Charles IV's chancery is symptomatic of

⁸ *Articuli dati in causa fidei contra Hieronymum de Praga, apud Van der Hardt, Magnum Concilium Oecumenicum Constanciense*, IV, col. 676.

⁹ Hardt, *loc. cit.*, col. 672.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, cols. 672-74.

the close connexion between the new bureaucracy, the bourgeoisie, and the reformers. Tomáš ze Štítného and Matěj z Janova were sons of country gentlemen who came to the city ; Peter Chelčický was of even humbler rural origin, and as he embodies a later stage of the reform movement, he may to some extent be held to voice the sentiments of the peasantry, which had not shared in the victory of the middle classes embodied in the Utraquist and Taborite parties. Hus was born in a village, but, coming as he did to the University of Prague while still an adolescent, he became and remained a typical Prager. The embodiment of the bourgeois character of the reform movement is Hus's dear friend, admirer, and fellow-martyr Jerome, whose only other name was "de Praga," "Pragensis" ; he is "Jeronym Pražský," almost the incarnation of the volatile, restless, zealous, reckless and inconstant city. Though he wandered, led by his *ardor discendi*, to Oxford, Paris, Heidelberg, Cologne, Jerusalem, Buda, Vienna, Cracow, Vitebsk, and Pskov, he ever returned to the country and city he loved so well. Though it is difficult to tell how true are the uncontrollable charges made against him by his accusers at Constance that he was the ringleader in all the excesses of the anti-clerical riots, the burning of the indulgence, the honouring as martyrs of the three youths who were executed, the organising of the insults to friars, crucifixes and relics, yet enough is clear from his own admissions to make it obvious that he was that sort of natural popular leader whom times of urban revolution breed, a more noble-minded Wat Tyler or Caboche, a more spiritually minded Étienne Marcel or Philip van Artevelde. He admits that he slapped the mouth of the Dominican Beneš of Innem who insulted him. (His accusers said that "he slapped Beneš's face in the public streets in the presence of a crowd of people, and Jerome drew his knife and would have struck him therewith, and probably have killed him or mortally wounded him, had he not been prevented by master Zdislas of Zvířetice.")¹¹ Another incident in Jerome's career as an agitator is instructive both as to the goings-on in Prague and the views of his accusers as to what was good evidence :

Similarly it is charged against Jerome that in the year 1412 in the month of September on St. Wenceslas' day in the Carmelite monastery he did command, procure and instruct certain laymen to throw on the ground certain relics which were placed there by a friar who was begging alms for the fabric, . . . and Jerome entered the monastery violently and took prisoner the friar Nicholas who was saying that Wyclif was a heretic who had been reproved by the Church, and led him away

¹¹ Hardt, *loc. cit.*, IV, 641-42.

captive with two other friars of the same monastery. These two he handed over to the magistrates of the city who put them in the prison of the New Town¹² among the thieves and robbers. But the friar Nicholas he kept in his own custody in prison for several days, and tortured him in devious ways. And not content with that, Jerome took him out in a boat on the river Moldau which flows strong and wide near to Prague, tied him to the end of a rope and threw him overboard, saying to the said friar some such words as these: "Now tell me, monk, was Master John Wyclif a holy and evangelical doctor or not?" wishing to force him to revoke those words he had spoken in the pulpit against Wyclif. And Jerome would certainly have drowned the friar had not help come from one of his followers and members of his household, who freed him from his great peril.

To this charge Jerome replied: "When I entered the monastery I found the two monks quarrelling with two citizens whose servant they had imprisoned. While I was talking calmly with them, many armed men rushed on me with swords. As I had then no weapon with me I snatched a sword from a layman who was standing by and defended myself as best I could against them. Afterwards I handed over two monks to the magistrate, and one I kept for myself."¹³

Though the Czech reform movement was fundamentally a social phenomenon, it was of course not consciously so. The realisation that the world was upside down, which manifested itself in Milíč's apocalyptic and in Matěj of Janov's plea for a return to the apostolic age, was largely subconscious. Nevertheless here and there we do observe a conscious social sense even in the early stages of the movement. Konrád Waldhauser, the Austrian preacher, whom Charles IV brought to Prague in 1363 and who was the master and inspiration of Milíč, made a bitter attack on the levying of burial dues and the traffic in the privilege of being buried in monasteries or friaries.¹⁴ This is a part of the programme which nearly all of his successors embraced; and it neatly anticipates that attack on mortuary dues, which was the first gesture of the English Reformation Parliament of 1529. The protests against the sale of indulgences, against the exploitation of popular superstition to extract money in return for the benefits conferred by relics and thaumaturgic statues and pictures, and against the charging of fees for the ministration of the Sacraments, are in part a protest against the materialisation of religion and the cult of *adinuenciones hominum*, and in part

¹² The magistrates of Nové Město were probably Czechs, not Germans as were those of the Staré Město.

¹³ I have conflated the articles of accusation in Hardt, IV, 641, with the additional articles, *ibid.*, 666-67.

¹⁴ Novotný, *Náboženské hnutí*, p. 60.

the revolt of the townsmen against exploitation by a clerical caste whose functions were becoming stereotyped and of a value that was decreasingly apparent. The same can be said of the protests which we find uttered by Hus and others against the feudal legal system, which gave the lord the right to inherit the property of a tenant who died without direct heirs.¹⁵ But it would be surprising if we could find evidence that the early reformers had a detailed social programme for the emancipation of the serf and the labourer. In the first place, serfdom did not become legally complete in Central Europe before the end of the 15th century, and in the second the early stages of the reform movement were so predominantly urban that the social condition of the peasantry did not impinge on its conscience. Indeed except for Chelčický and the Unity of Brethren, all the Hussite parties so identified themselves with the townsmen and the gentry that they viewed the increasing subjection of the peasantry with indifference at the best. Hus's social philosophy was completely orthodox: it is the duty of the *laboriosi* to work to support the clergy and the *majorates*, and it is the duty of the clergy and lords to obey God's commandments.¹⁶ Such is the theme of Hus's preaching in Bethlehem. Of course all the reformers wax indignant at the way God's poor are robbed by priests who curse for tithes, and who use alms originally intended for the poor to adorn their churches and themselves; but this is pure moral indignation, not due to any feeling that there ought not to be any poor.

* * *

In considering the social aspects of the reform movement we must bear in mind that the merchants and craftsmen were not the only beneficiaries of the commercial revolution. The advent of an economy of production for sale and profit also favoured the professional farmer, the man who owned freehold hereditary land, which he farmed with serf labour, and the produce of which he sold to the towns. These country gentry, the Pastons of England, the *vladyky* of Bohemia and Moravia, the *szlachta* of Poland, the innumerable "nobles" of Hungary—were the economic counterpart of the towns: the landlords fed the towns and the towns supplied the landlords with their clothes, tools, weapons, ornaments and luxuries. These country gentry were pushing themselves into the English House of Commons, the Spanish Cortes, the Bohemian Diet; they monopolised the government of the Hungarian counties and the

¹⁵ Novotný, *Náboženské hnutí*, pp. 138, 139, 255.

¹⁶ Kybal, *M. Jan Hus, Učení*, II, 2, p. 361.

Polish provincial Diets, whence they were sent as delegates to the national parliaments.

As the reform movement in Bohemia develops and begins to spread outside the city and university of Prague, so do the gentry become increasingly involved in it. When Hus in 1412 went into voluntary exile from Prague in order to save it from the interdict his excommunicated presence would have incurred, he spent two years in the towns and the manor houses of the Bohemian countryside, the effect of which can be seen in the loyal support he received from the Bohemian gentry at Constance. There his comfort and safety were the constant care of John of Chlum, Henry of Lacenbok and Wenceslas of Duba, which was but an earnest of the letters of indignation and protest which, after Hus's death, were signed by scores of nobles and gentry of Bohemia and Moravia.¹⁷ The measure of support which Hus had from this class was clearly expressed during the Council, much to the alarm of the Emperor Sigismund, who was heir-presumptive to the kingdom of Bohemia. The political significance of the passage has long been recognised, but it is worth repeating here as evidence that the reformers had to support not so much of a nation as of a social class.

The cardinal of Cambrai said to Hus: "Master John! when you were brought to the bishop's palace we asked you how you had come and you said you had come here freely; and that had you not wanted to come neither the king of Bohemia nor the lord king of the Romans could have compelled you to come." And the master replied: "Indeed I said that I came here freely, and had I not been willing to come, there are so many great lords in the kingdom of Bohemia who love me, in whose castles I might have lain hidden, that neither that king nor this could have forced me to come here." The cardinal nodded his head and his countenance somewhat changed and he said: "See this hardihood!" And lord John [of Chlum], when some of those standing by murmured, said to them: "He is speaking the truth; I am but a poor knight in our kingdom, and yet I would have been quite willing to entertain him for a year, let who will like it or not, so that they could not have got him. And there are many and great lords who love him, who have strong castles where they could have harboured him for as long as they liked, even against both their kings."¹⁸

¹⁷ The letter of 2 September, 1415 (Hardt, IV, 495-97; Palacký, *Documenta*, pp. 580 ff.), was signed by 61 persons "in pleno concilio magnatum, baronum, procerum, et nobilium regni Bohemie et marchionatus Moravie." They pledged themselves "legem domini nostri Jesu Christi, ipsiusque devotos, humiles et constantes predicatorum, usque ad effusionem sanguinis . . . defendere."

The letter of 30 December, 1415, was signed by 432 nobles and gentlemen.

¹⁸ Petri de Mladenovic, *Relatio*, apud Palacký, *Documenta*, p. 283.

Sigismund was to realise the truth of John of Chlum's assertion when he and his Hungarian forces tried to seize Bohemia in 1420, when these "many and strong" nobles roundly defeated him at Sudomeř and Vitkov.

It is also worthy of remark that it was not only the Czech gentry who stood by Hus at Constance. The Polish delegates also befriended him. In a letter which Hus wrote describing the first day of his trial, 5 June 1415, he said: "Some cried out: 'Let him be burned!', and especially Michael de Causis, whom I heard. I felt that I had not one friend in this whole crowd of clergy, except 'Pater' and one Polish doctor, whom I knew."¹⁹ And earlier, on 14 May, when Peter of Mladoňovice had organised a complaint to the Council about the barbarous treatment of Hus in prison, in addition to the names of the Czech signatories there are those of Zawisza Czarny of Garbów, the most famous Polish knight of that time, Janusz of Tulisków, castellan of Kalisz, and the Polish lords Boruta, Donin, Balicki and others.²⁰ That Czech reformist ideas spread early to Poland is well known; and it is probable that Jerome's activities in Cracow in 1413, when he engaged in a great public disputation in the University,²¹ and when he accompanied Prince Witold of Lithuania on a great progress to Vitebsk, Pskov and Wilno, had much to do with winning the sympathy of the Polish gentry. Jerome may have performed much the same function in Hungary and Austria, where his activities were thus described by the official of the archbishop of Passau:

What rumour had already reported was recently plainly announced to us on behalf of the University, namely that a certain master of arts, called Jerome of Prague, implicated in certain Wyclifite errors condemned by the apostolic See, careless of his soul's safety, was bold to disseminate these errors in Heidelberg, in Prague and in Hungary, where he was many times ignominiously confuted by the faithful of Christ and supporters of orthodox belief. And now he has made his way to the glorious university of Vienna, our beloved mother in whom is no wrinkle of duplicity . . . in order to infect with his perverse doctrine the hearts of the weak . . . and to propagate even wider his erroneous sect.²²

More precisely the articles charged against Jerome at Constance said:

The same Jerome in Hungary, in Buda, in the presence of the most serene prince and lord Sigismund, king of the Romans and of Hungary,

¹⁹ Palacký, *Documenta*, p. 105.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 258, 556; Hardt, IV, 188.

²¹ Described in a letter of Albert, bishop of Cracow, of 2 April, 1413: Palacký, *Documenta*, p. 506.

²² *Processus habitus Viennae*, ed. Klicman, L., Prague, 1898, p. 37.

in the royal chapel of the castle of Buda, in the year 1410, on the Thursday before Easter,—he, being a layman, dressed in lay habit and wearing a long beard, in the presence of the lord king and of many reverend fathers, bishops and other prelates and of others of diverse estates, publicly preached many things scandalous and erroneous in the faith, and also heresies about the sacrament of the altar, and other things contrary to church order and offensive to pious ears, whence might follow sedition and popular commotions made by temporal lords against the clergy.²³

It is interesting to speculate why the seeds thus promisingly sown in Poland and Hungary failed to take permanent root. Bishop Albert of Cracow ironically said after Jerome's departure from Poland: "Our land seems to be too arid to receive the seed that he sows and to bear fruit, because the simple people are not able to understand his dogmas; much less can the lands of the Lithuanians and Russians do so."²⁴ The bishop was right in so far as Poland was less affected by the commercial revolution than was Bohemia. When the *szlachta* later succeeded in excluding the Polish towns from foreign trade and from the Diet, they so enfeebled what would have been the best forcing ground of reform that the movement, which had shown much early promise, was easily nipped in the bud by archbishop Oleśnicki, after the death of those early patrons of the reformers, queen Jadwiga and prince Witold.

In Hungary, though apparently Hussite ideas did for a time get some hold in the German-Slovak mining towns, they were almost obliterated when the feeble civic life of Hungary was emasculated by the triumph of the Hungarian nobility and the choking up of the Danubian trade routes by the advance of the uncommercial Turk.

* * *

The moral disease that afflicted Europe in the later middle ages was the inevitable concomitant of the social crisis. The moral code that had been effective for the preservation of a purely agricultural society was proving inadequate to solve the new moral problems presented by an economy of buying and selling. Gregory the Great's *Magna Moralia* had nothing to say about the ethics of capital, banking, market prices, rates of interest, partnership and company promoting. The moral code which had justly condemned the money-lender in the interests of the peasant farmer was now hampering the development of commercial and industrial credit, and was therefore being evaded with the help of all sorts of sophistries and

²³ Hardt, IV, 673.

²⁴ Palacký, *Documenta*, p. 506.

fictions. The attempt to apply the moral code of one type of society to another basically different inevitably resulted in widespread disobedience to ancient precepts. In such circumstances morality could not but become convention rather than conviction. It was an atmosphere in which precept ceased to coincide with practice even in the preceptor. Salvation from the prevalent sense of sin was sought in conformity to outworn rules, in external acts, in works rather than faith. How universal the moral disease was can be seen in nearly all contemporary writers: in Chaucer's "Miller's Tale" and "Clerk's Tale," in the second part of the *Roman de la Rose*, in Boccaccio's *Decameron*; how desperate was the search for a remedy appears in Langland's *Piers Plowman*, in the visions and prophecies of St. Brigit of Sweden and St. Catherine of Siena. The immense volume of polemical literature produced by the murder of Louis of Orleans in 1407 and the problem of the right or wrong of tyrannicide illustrates the acuteness of the moral crisis and the failure of the conscience of Christendom assembled at Constance to give any lead at all.

The Czech reform movement was an integral part of this general European phenomenon. The disease was as bad in Bohemia as it was in Tuscany or England; the protests of Waldhauser, Milíč, Matěj z Janova and Hus were as eloquent and trenchant as those of Wyclif, Fitzralph, Petrarch or Gerson. One passage from the *Regulae Veteris et Novi Testamenti* of Matěj z Janova must serve to illustrate the Czech share in this European concert of moral indignation.

This outward appearance and splendour of earthly things which is contrived for the pleasure of the flesh, the delight of the eyes and the pride of life by Christians who are lovers of this world . . . is the figure of the Beast with horns [Revelation xvii]. . . .

Look for example at those noble esquires who make their honour and their boast in their fathers after the flesh, but not at all in Christ Jesus, and who take more emulous pride in their noble birth than in the fact that they are of the generation of Jesus Christ. So hot do they get about it that they perpetrate deeds that can without qualification be described as Beastly. For the honour of their birth and breeding they wound each other mortally, fight duels, and that with edged weapons, and often naked or half naked, quite deliberately when there was plenty of time for taking counsel, knowing full well that one or the other of them must be killed and go to hell. Sometimes they fight each other for glory, sometimes for the love of their mistresses. Any one who has his eyes open cannot help seeing that such creatures are not men, and certainly not Christians, but ferocious and irrational beasts.

As I began to say the whole outward appearance of the dress and body of such men is the exact representation of the Beast with horns. . . .

Women too, by a wonderful dispensation, also strive to be horned in their outward appearance, so that they also publicly display themselves as perfect beasts ; for with great art and much labour they build up their headdress into at least three sharp horns, one on their foreheads and one on either side. And then they make two other horns on their bosoms by making their breasts stick out, even if they are naturally flat-chested, by the fashion in which their gowns are cut. . . . Finally these women bear two horns on their feet in the shape of the long pointed shoes they wear, as anyone can see.²⁵

From that Matěj goes on to a circumstantial account of the immodesty of the contemporary dress of both men and women that can be paralleled in a hundred sermons being preached at the same period all the way from Paul's Cross to the Týn church of Prague. And so it is with the remedies that the Czech reformers have to prescribe : at the same time when Matěj was pleading in pulpit and tractate with the people of Prague for a turning from the vanity and hypocrisy of the *adinvenciones hominum* to *Jhesus crucifixus*, to the Bible, and to the sacramental grace of frequent communion in the saving body of Christ, the Lollards were taking the vernacular Bible and the apostolic evangel to the people of England. Not till Jerome brought Wyclif's *Dialogus* and *Trialogus* from Oxford to Prague at the turn of the century did Czech reformers realise that they were not fighting a lone battle. But the discovery that the *doctor evangelicus* had fought the same battles as those in which they were engaged made the Czech reformers welcome him, even to the extent of making his very words their own.

The remedy for moral disorder in the 14th and 15th centuries was inevitably sought in terms of religion, as an answer to the age-old question : " How shall a man be saved ? " The revolutionaries everywhere were answering : " Not by works alone ; not by absolution and penance, not by indulgences or miracle-working relics and images ; not by vain repetitions and outward acts, *but* by a change of heart, penitence and not penance, by the indwelling of the Spirit." It was this religious sentiment that underlay the whole of the great controversy of the philosophers in the Schools during the 14th century, the battle between Nominalism and Realism. Led by the great Franciscan schoolmen, from Roger Bacon, through Duns Scotus, and Occam, philosophy had adjusted itself to the changing order of things, by concentrating its attention on the sensible world,

²⁵ Matěj z Janova, *Regulae*, ed. Kybal, IV, 222-24.

dismissing ideas and abstractions as mere *flatus vocis*, setting apart the world of faith from that of reason, as something which man must accept as revelation, but beyond rationalisation. This Nominalism had become the current philosophy, especially at the acknowledged centre of European thought, the University of Paris, where its leading exponents at the beginning of the 15th century were John Gerson, chancellor of the University, and Peter d'Ailli, later cardinal of Cambrai. But while this new Nominalism, with its interest in the perceptible and the measurable and its adumbrations of the scientific method and spirit, was itself the response to the needs of a developing commercial society, it singularly failed to give an answer to the specifically moral and religious question of the day. It is true that the rationalism of the Nominalists made them zealous enemies of superstition and exposers of thaumaturgy; but that was purely destructive work; they had little positive contribution to make to the solution of psychological or spiritual problems. Therefore, though Nominalism was firmly entrenched in Paris and in the new German universities then being established at Heidelberg, Cologne, Leipzig and Vienna, it never succeeded in getting such mastery in the universities of either Oxford or Prague. In Oxford there was a rival philosophical development. It too stemmed from Duns Scotus, but followed him on that side of his teaching which had exalted Will above Reason, and the intense ethical interests of a series of seculars in the University of Oxford, Richard Fitzralph, Bradwardine, Holkot and Wyclif, pursued this line towards a neo-Augustinian theology and psychology, which led Bradwardine into uncompromising predestinarianism, and Wyclif very near to it. In the realm of metaphysics this alternative development became a new Realism, insistent on the reality of universals, of which Wyclif was the most able and eminent exponent in Europe.

At the same time a similar philosophical divergence was manifesting itself at Prague, where metaphysical debate was exacerbated by national animosity. Modelled as it was on the universities of Paris and Bologna, looking as it did to Paris as a place to which its own able scholars should go for further study, it was inevitable that from its foundation in 1348 the University of Prague should be inclined towards Parisian Nominalism. Indeed its first two generations of eminent scholars were Nominalists—Henry Totting, Konrad von Soltau, John Marienwerder, John Isner, Matthias of Liegnitz, Nicholas of Javor, Henry of Bitterfeld, and Albert Engelschalk. They were all enemies of superstition and zealous moralists; but their writings are marked by the negative aridity of Nominalism,

and they were all Germans or Germanised Silesians. But towards the end of the 14th century we begin to see the beginnings in Prague of an Augustinian, ethical and Realist reaction. What its origins were and whether it goes back beyond the arrival of Wyclif's philosophical works about 1391 are matters on which more research is necessary. What is clear is that the philosophical schism was from the beginning tied up with the opposition of the Czech "nation" in the university to the dominant Bavarian, Saxon and Polish (Silesian) nations. The champions of Wyclif's Realism—Stanislav of Znojmo, Marek of Hradec, Stephen Pálec, Hus, and Jerome—were all Czechs. Why there should have been this parallel philosophical and national dichotomy, I cannot say; there is a temptation to ascribe it unscientifically to some inherent quality in the Slavs which found the idealism of the Realists more congenial than the rationalism of the Nominalists: but I am inclined to believe that the Czech scholars were ready to pick any bone with their German colleagues, and that they found in Realism and Wyclif a potent force with which to attack the specific moral and political problems of their own day and their own country. How closely philosophical and national considerations were interlocked can be seen in the battle royal of the scholastic war which was fought out in the great university debate of 1409. In the presence of the ambassadors of the duke of Brabant, the consuls of the Old Town, and a vast concourse of doctors, masters and students, Matthias Knín opened his *quodlibet* on the theme "Whether it is necessary to posit universals apart from things if the harmony of the world is to be sensible." Knín had but recently been charged with Wyclifite errors before archbishop Zbyněk, and such was his unpopularity with the German Nominalist masters that they had to be ordered to attend by King Wenceslas himself. The three days of debate culminated in the famous speech made by Jerome, the so-called *Recommendatio liberalium artium*, which established his reputation for eloquence, though it is less a formal exposition of Realism than an attack on the German masters, a defence of the orthodoxy of the Czechs, and a plea for the right of students to study Wyclif, even though some of what he wrote had been officially condemned.²⁶ With a characteristic sense of the dramatic Jerome concluded his oration by producing and reading the notorious Oxford letter of 1406, which

²⁶ For an account of Knín's *quodlibet* see Novotný, *M. Jan Hus*, I., 301-13. Jerome's speeches at the *quodlibet* and at its continuation in his debate with Blažej Vlk a few weeks later are all that we have of Jerome's continuous composition. These speeches are published in Höfler, *Geschichtschreiber*, p. 126 (there wrongly ascribed to Hus), and Sedlák, J., *Studie a Texty*, II.

purported to give the official support of that university to Wyclif's orthodoxy.

Knín's *quodlibet* was the last act of the undivided university of Prague, for a fortnight later, 18 January, 1409, King Wenceslas issued the decree of Kutná Hora which transferred the majority of votes from the Germans to the Czechs, and led to the departure of the German masters to Leipzig and Erfurt. Henceforward the Czechs, and therefore Wyclifite Realism, were supreme at Prague, and the philosophical controversy was not renewed until Hus and Jerome went to Constance, there to defend their views.

It is clear that to many of the Fathers of the Council the most serious charge against Hus and Jerome was their Realism. With some justice they felt that it was the Realist refusal to believe that accidents could subsist without continuity of substance which had led Wyclif into the heresy that the material bread and wine remain after the consecration of the elements in the Sacrament of the altar. Though Hus had steadfastly refused to pursue his philosophical Wyclifitism to that logical conclusion, and though the sentence of condemnation on Jerome expressly admitted his Eucharistic orthodoxy, nevertheless Gerson and his fellows were convinced that Realism was inherently likely to lead to the heresy of Remanence. This connexion between the philosophical and doctrinal aspects of the problem is well illustrated by the following passage from Mladoňovice's *Relacio* (proceedings of 7 June, 1415) :

Further it is alleged that John Hus in June 1410 and at other times in the chapel called Bethlehem and at other places in the city of Prague did preach to the people there assembled many errors and heresies both from the books of the late John Wyclif and out of his own obstinacy and guile, and that he did teach, maintain and defend them, and chiefly this, that after the consecration of the Host on the altar material bread remains. And they adduced witnesses on this point : doctors, prelates, parish priests, etc. And the master, calling God and his conscience to witness, replied that he had not said or maintained any such thing. . . . Then the cardinal of Cambrai, taking up a paper which he said had come into his hands late on the previous day, and holding it in his hand, asked master John whether he held that universals exist apart from things ; and he replied that he did, as St. Anselm and others had done. Then the cardinal argued : " It follows then that after consecration the substance of material bread remains ; for, once the consecration has been made, while the bread is changed and transubstantiated into the body of Christ, as you admit, either the general substance of material bread remains, or not. If it does, then my point is proved ; if not, it follows that on the ceasing to be of the individual piece of bread,

the universal also ceases to be." Hus replied that the universal does cease to be in this individual material bread, when it is thus changed or passes into the body of Christ or is transubstantiated, but nevertheless the universal remains the subject of other individuals. Then a certain Englishman got up and tried to prove that Hus's argument proved that material bread does remain. And the master said: "That is the sort of childish argument which boys learn in schools, and its falsity is self-evident. . . ." ²⁷

With this may be compared the charges made against Jerome, first at the Vienna trial of 1410 and then at Constance in 1416, though in Jerome's case the argument was that his Realism led to Trinitarian rather than to Eucharistic heresy. For example at Vienna John of Vohburg gave evidence that Jerome had written: "Universals must be predicated of the divine mind . . . quality is extrinsically present in virtue of the form of things; for every quality is determined by the substantial form which it follows, and is therefore the instrument of its action or the decoration of its subject, and so quality is essentially conserved by substantial form." To us the chief fault of such opinions may well seem the obscure jargon in which they were expressed, but the Church rightly sensed Wyclifism and the danger of heresy and schism. Had Wyclif not been led on by his philosophy to challenge not only sacramental dogma but also the authority of the Church? He had said that if the Church taught a doctrine of transubstantiation which was metaphysically impossible, the Church was wrong; if the Church misused indulgences, excommunication, reservations, tithes and tenths, then the Church must be opposed. Wyclif had asked a question which perplexed men were asking throughout Christendom—"Where is the Church? In the greedy, corrupt, sinful, ambitious Curia of Rome or Avignon, or in the whole body of Christ's elect?" The dual and the triple schism in the west, added to the ancient eastern schism, made this question topical and urgent. Since 1409 there were three persons, each claiming to be Christ's Vicar, each proclaiming the other two to be usurpers, schismatics and heretics, each maintaining a court as costly to one-third of Christendom as before 1378 the one Curia had been to the whole. In England Wyclif was driven to advocate that after the death of Urban VI the English should live without a pope "as the Greeks do." For a generation the rulers and universities of France, Germany, Spain and Italy agitated the question of how the Schism could be ended, and many were driven to accept the sovereignty of the General Council as the

²⁷ Palacký, *Documenta*, pp. 266-67.

only solution. In Bohemia Matěj z Janova was forced to exclaim :

This great city of the world of Christians is severed into three parts, that of the Romans in the south, the Greeks in the east, and the French in the west. The Romans say : " Here is the Church and here is Christ." The French say : " It is not so, for we are the Church and Christ is here." And the Greeks continually say : " Ye lie, both of you, for we are the Church and Christ is here." See how the Gospel is literally fulfilled which says : " In those days they shall say to you, Lo, here is Christ, or there." Behold how the sun and moon are darkened so that even the city that is set on a hill is hid and covered in darkness that it cannot be seen, in such a way that of the infinite multitude of Christians it would not be easy to find one who is certain where the one true Church of God is. . . .

I myself believe that Christ is in the Roman obedience. But what I say I say in relation to the whole body of those who were formerly called Christians, and I speak relatively to the certainty in the primitive Church of the saints where it was well known where was the Church and where was Christ. But to-day there is no such certainty as to which part of Christendom Christ is in that anyone would be so bold as to be willing to die for it.²⁸

It is from such a fundamental and general perplexity that Hus's doctrine of the Church evolves. The fact that his *de Ecclesia* follows Wyclif almost verbatim through much of its course is not so much evidence of Hus's lack of originality, as Loserth would have it, as evidence that the disease from which Bohemia was suffering was general. The Hussite movement was in no sense an isolated manifestation of some idiosyncrasy of the Czech character, but the local form taken by revolt against the social, moral, philosophical, religious and ecclesiastical confusion of the general European revolution. That in Bohemia alone in the 15th century it resulted in a successful and enduring national schism was due in part to the advanced economic condition of the country, in part to the fact that its aspirations for religious autonomy came to be involved in the struggle against the political claims of the Emperor Sigismund to subordinate the interests of Bohemia to the needs of his disorderly and bankrupt Empire, and in part to the spiritual and military leadership of Hus and Žižka. Nevertheless even the Hussite wars and the national monarchy of George of Poděbrady are not an aberration from the highroad of historical development in Europe, as was to be seen when, a hundred years after the death of Hus, Luther, Henry VIII, Zwingli, and Calvin took half Europe along the path that the Czechs had already travelled. R. R. BETTS.

²⁸ Matěj z Janova, *Regulae*, I, 294-95.